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The Quest for the Religious Freud: Faith, Morality, and Gender in Psychoanalysis


In a letter to Swiss pastor Oskar Pfister in 1918, Sigmund Freud wrote, “Why did none of the devout create psychoanalysis? Why did it have to wait for a completely godless Jew?” Casually denying both Freud’s Judaism and his “godlessness,” Pfister replied, “A better Christian there never was!”

Like the nineteenth-century “quest for the historical Jesus,” the recent quest for the historical Freud has proven remarkable in the variety and diversity of its formulations. The self-proclaimed “godless Jew” becomes, in Peter Gay’s recent volume of that title, more godless than Jewish. Paul Vitz, following Pfister’s lead in claiming Freud for Christianity, makes him neither godless nor Jewish. Joachim Scharfenberg finds a theological Freud seeking faith. Julia Kristeva finds a post-atheistic Freud. Eli Sagan finds a troubled moralist.
The recent scholarship on Freud is guilty of the same kind of ideological projection as that uncovered by Albert Schweitzer in his 1906 exposé of the assumptions underlying the “historical Jesus” scholarship: the search for the religious Freud evinces a search for an atheist, Christian, or Jew who mirrors the personal and intellectual assumptions of the seeker. Ironically, of the three issues emerging as central concerns in recent literature on Freud—Jewishness, ethics, and gender—Jewishness and ethics were also the focus of heated debate among nineteenth-century Biblical scholars.

Dennis Klein (1985) has functioned as the Schweitzer of Freud scholarship in revealing the ideologies beneath the debate over Freud’s Jewishness. Many biographers, even those with admirable intentions, have either denied or underestimated the psychoanalytic movement’s Jewish context and content. Desiring to emphasize the universal truths discovered by Freud, Ernest Jones, Freud’s “official” biographer and the first non-Jew in Freud’s inner circle, downplayed Freud’s Jewish identity. Alternately, a tradition of overestimation of Freud’s Jewish identity has attempted either to dismiss psychoanalysis as merely a Jewish crypto-science or to foster Jewish interests by demonstrating the creative impact of Jews on modern life. Each of these positions is prone to ideological excess. Each is ahistorical, ignoring both the changing political and religious context of Freud’s life and the shifting meaning of Judaism for him (Klein, 1985, xii).

Freud was, throughout his life, a “godless Jew,” but both his godlessness and his Jewishness took on different meanings in different circumstances. These changes are particularly evident during the formative decades of his youth and the period of his discovery of psychoanalysis. A source of shame and suffering prior to 1880, his Jewishness meant a proudly held sectarian and ethnic identity in the late 1880s and an ethical universalism and a firm foundation of psychoanalysis in the 1890s. Jewishness never, however, meant belief in God. Freud’s godlessness is a less variable concept, but it, too, is more nuanced than most biographers make it.

The question of Freud’s personal religious identity must be seen against the background of Austrian politics. Born in 1856, Freud was an Eastern European Jew whose family moved to Vienna in 1859 in a climate of political liberalism and toleration. The liberalism of the 1860s and 70s resulted in an unprecedented integration of Jews into Austrian culture. As a youth, Freud embraced Austrian assimilationism and German nationalism, even going so far as to change his name from the Jewish Sigismund to the more Germanic Sigmund.

Freud’s childhood home was not atypical among Jewish families in liberal Austria. Assimilated to the cosmopolitan culture of Vienna, the family spoke
German and ignored such observances as the Sabbath. As a youth, Freud read the Old Testament avidly, but he saw the Bible as a humanitarian and ethical document, not as a sacred text. His assimilated Judaism was essentially non-religious. As a university student influenced by the rationalism and determinism of Helmholtz, Darwin, and Brücke, he defined himself as an atheistic, scientific materialist.

However, letters between Freud and his friend Silberstein reveal the complexity of Freud's "godlessness" at this time. In the 1870s Freud took five courses at the University of Vienna from the Catholic philosopher Franz Brentano, whose sophisticated arguments for the existence of God influenced him deeply. A letter to Silberstein in 1875 says, "At the moment I am no longer a materialist but not yet a theist .... In the course of several semesters I mean to become thoroughly acquainted with (Brentano's) philosophy and until then to reserve judgment on it as well as to hold off a decision between theism and materialism" (McGrath, 1986, 118). Freud's 1927 work, *The Future of an Illusion*, represents a return to his debates with Brentano.

In the 1880s the decades of Austrian liberalism came to an end in a massive political shift marked by the end of assimilationism and a sharp rise in anti-Semitism. These were years of profound disillusionment and moral outrage for Freud, leading to a defensive, defiant Jewishness, which, by the mid 1880s, had matured to a Jewish pride that was more than defensive.

But Freud remained firmly opposed to religious belief and ritual. His opposition to ritual even led him to consider conversion to Protestantism in order to have a civil wedding and thereby avoid an orthodox Jewish ceremony. If the 1870s had represented a period of godless, assimilated Jewishness for Freud, by the end of the 1880s Freud was a godless Jew in another sense: his still atheistic Jewishness was an expression of ethnic pride.

Struggling to establish his professional career amidst the continuing anti-Semitism of the 1890s led to further developments in Freud's Jewish identity. He joined B’nai B’rith in 1897. In both ideology and membership this group prefigured the analytic circle Freud founded in 1902. Common to both was a sense of a universalist, ethical mission based on Jewish identity. Both groups defined their Jewishness as allegiance to the ideals of progress, humanitarianism, and ethical universalism. With a degree of missionary fervor Freud expressed the view that Jewish consciousness imparted to psychoanalysis "a dynamism aimed at benefiting all mankind" (Klein, 1985, 148).

By 1908, however, Freud desired to broaden the appeal of the psychoanalytic movement. He wrote of the danger of the movement's becoming a "Jewish National Affair," and he argued in 1910 that "it is absolutely essential that I should
form ties in the world of general science” (Klein, 94). But he never completely abandoned his sense of psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science” or his sense of identity with Moses. In the preface to the Hebrew translation of *Totem and Taboo*, he said, for example, “If the question were put to (me): ‘Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your countrymen, what is there left to you that is Jewish?’ I would reply: ‘A very great deal, and probably its very essence’” (in McGrath, 1988, 29).

Letters and accounts of private conversations reveal a continuing fascination with the ideas of theism, God, and the occult. Freud’s published writings are rife with the playful use of religious language and metaphor: he speaks, for example of “our God Logos” and of the “Heavenly Powers.” Clearly, his godlessness was never monolithic. Publicly, however, Freud always remained a godless Jew: atheistic in terms of belief and Jewish in terms of ethnic identity and ethical universalism.


There is little that can be said in favor of Vitz’s book. Vitz has gathered a massive collection of gossip, speculations, and misinterpretations. His thesis is that Freud had a lifelong attraction to Christianity and deeply desired to be baptized. He develops this thesis by seeking out references to God, the Bible, Rome, and Christian authors or artists in Freud’s letters and published works. Any such reference functions as proof of Freud’s putative desire for baptism. Alternately, references to the Devil, Hell, and the Anti-Christ reveal Freud’s deep ambivalence about Christianity, which in turn “proves” his (repressed) attraction to it.

Vitz offers little acknowledgment of the historical context which made assimilation attractive in the 1870s and impossible later; nor is there any acknowledgment of the anti-Semitism Freud faced throughout his life. Freud’s 1870s assimilationism is interpreted as a desire to convert to Christianity (86) rather than a response to Austrian liberalism. His thought of converting to Protestantism in order to have a civil rather than religious wedding ceremony is interpreted not as anti-ritualistic but as pro-Christian (94). Freud’s 1897 dream series about laying siege to Rome is interpreted by Vitz as a literal desire for Catholic conversion (86). Freud himself saw these dreams as an angry response to the increased Catholic and Austrian anti-Semitism of the 1890s.
Vitz seeks the source of Freud’s personal desire for baptism and his intellectual hostility to religious belief in childhood experiences—particularly in his love for the Catholic nanny who had cared for him during his first two and a half or three years and in the trauma of her sudden departure. In a scenario meant to explain the nanny’s departure, Vitz suggests that Freud’s mother, Amalie, had an affair with Freud’s half-brother Philip. The nanny, according to Vitz, discovered the lovers and was fired to protect their secret.

The nanny/mother/lover combination is ubiquitous in Vitz. It is used to explain not only Freud’s atheism but also most of the components of his life and theory. Freud’s fascination with sexuality and incest is explained as a continuation of childhood curiosity about the Amalie-Philip relationship. Freud’s rejection of the “divine father” is explained as an inevitable result of his loss of respect for the personal father betrayed by Amalie and Philip (36). Freud’s critique of religion in *The Future of an Illusion* is seen as “an expression of his attempt to cope with lost happiness...” [H]e was consciously turning with bitterness and anger... on his nanny and on the ideas so deeply associated with her: salvation Christianity, and the Catholic church” (216). Freud’s rejection of Judaism is caused by the nanny’s putative anti-Semitism (103); his “love” of Christianity and his fascination with Rome by her Catholicism; his dislike of music by the church bells he “might” have heard while in Catholic churches with her (117); his choice of the name “Anna” for his daughter by its rhyming with “nana” (29). The nanny is even brought out to explain the absence of the Virgin Mary in Freud’s writings: the nanny was too old to provide a good psychological symbol for the Virgin Mary (191).

Vitz discovers “evidence” for these claims through a hermeneutics of transparency: anything Freud wrote is self-revelation. All the metapsychological writings are disguised autobiography, while the case histories represent materials Freud chose to discuss because they resembled his own life (138). Freud’s letters and dreams are plundered as well. But even without such “evidence” Vitz is unperturbed. He does not hesitate to offer speculations about what Freud “probably” experienced or what “might” have happened. Vitz’s argument is a travesty of scholarly research and methodology, and a paradigmatic example of the dangers of psychobiographies that ignore historical and political contexts.

In a classic *ad hominem* argument Vitz tries to show that Freud’s atheism is a pathological and neurotic response to childhood trauma, that Freud’s critique of religion in general is psychologically determined and erroneous, and that Freud’s entire theory can be explained away as mere symptom. Vitz remains unaware of the irony that his own methodology of psychoanalyzing the psychoanalyst remains dependent upon the tools he attempts to prove erroneous.
Freud's complex identity as a godless Jew is not addressed by Vitz's text. German theologian Joachim Scharfenberg and French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, however, offer more sophisticated analyses of Freud's identity. Both contribute to a nuanced understanding of his "godlessness." Scharfenberg's primary concern is the psychoanalytic critique of religion rather than the personal faith of Freud the man. But he, too, seeks to find faith embedded in the atheism of psychoanalytic theory. Through a careful examination of Freud's writings on delusion he discovers within Freud an acknowledgment that although religion may be delusory, it is nevertheless meaningful. By calling religion a delusion, Freud implies a homology with other delusory "symptoms": religion functions as a "meaningful reaction of the psyche in an attempt to heal itself" (135). Not content with finding religion for Freud meaningful but wrong, Scharfenberg finds in The Future of an Illusion an acknowledgment that religion actually contains a certain historical truth: the historical memory of the primal horde. Thus, Scharfenberg argues convincingly, Freud leaves open the possibility for the coexistence of faith and the reality principle. Finally, Scharfenberg goes beyond Freud's texts to reshape Freud's atheism into faith. He suggests that in his lifelong occupation with religious phenomena Freud was searching for "a mature form of faith that would correspond to the state of psychic maturity for which he strived with his patients... a faith that did not distort reality through delusion and which... did not remain bound to an ahistorical metaphysics of the soul" (145).

Kristeva's discussion of psychoanalysis and faith is the most valuable of these books under review. Her comments are not biographical but focus on psychoanalysis as therapy. By implication, however, she suggests that Freud renounced both faith and atheism.

In The Future of an Illusion Freud had defined illusion not as an idea which is necessarily wrong but as an idea whose source is an unconscious wish. Religion is illusory: neither provable nor disprovable, it originates in wishes for consolation, protection, or eternal life. Although Freud recommends a strenuous, reality-oriented life without the consolation of illusions, Kristeva aims to restore illusion to its full therapeutic and epistemological value. She shows that analysis leads to a simultaneous renunciation of illusion through a skepticism regarding all received knowledge and a resumption of transitory ludic illusions: "the function of psychoanalysis is to reawaken the imagination and to permit illusions to exist." But, she asks, "Does this mean restoring value to religion as well? Not altogether" (1987, 18). Her renunciation of both faith and atheism allows Freud his godlessness without locking him into a rigid atheism: "Repres-
sion can be atheist, atheism is repressive, whereas the experience of psycho­
analytic can lead to renunciation of faith with clear understanding" (26).

The faith of Freud has emerged as a compelling issue in this recent literature. Vitz projects his own Christian fundamentalism onto Freud. The theologian Scharfenberg addresses the question carefully but cannot resist making Freud into a seeker of faith. Only the psychoanalyst Kristeva honors Freud's godless­

Another compelling issue in the recent proliferation of interpretations of Freud is that of gender and morality. Eli Sagan in *Freud, Women, and Morality* criticizes psychoanalytic theory of morality by uncovering logical inconsisten­
cies in Freud's analysis of the superego. These inconsistencies, he suggests, are

Sagan's discussion of the psychoanalytic theory of the superego is well-con­
ceived and carefully argued. He points out that Freud has three kinds of texts on morality: cultural texts like *Totem and Taboo* which offer a hypothetical theory of the origins of the moral impulse in civilization; metapsychological texts like *The Ego and the Id* which explain the role of the Oedipus Complex in the develop­
ment of the superego; and case histories like "Little Hans" which graphically demonstrate the workings of the Oedipus Complex. Sagan demonstrates the contradictions among these texts. While the metapsychological texts argue that the renunciation of Oedipal fantasies leads to the resolution of the Oedipus Complex and the development of the superego, the case history shows Little Hans working through his Oedipal Complex by means of dreams which allow him to imagine the fulfillment of Oedipal fantasies; and the reconstruction of the origins of culture and morality in the primal horde has the sons successfully fulfilling their parricidal fantasies.

Sagan sees the metapsychological texts as erroneous, arguing that fantasized fulfillment of wishes, rather than renunciation of wishes, allows for moral de­
velopment: "consummation, not renunciation, is the way to psychic health" (85). Why, he asks, did Freud reject in his theoretical works a truth that had been clearly perceived in the case history and in the myth of cultural origins? The inconsistencies, Sagan suggests, are a result of repression and denial of pre-Oedipal trauma, a repression which is responsible for his erroneous view of morality, his exclusion of women from renunciatory morality, and his misogy­
nist theory of female sexuality. "Freud revenged himself on all women-mothers by constructing a theory that established their genital and moral equipment as
vastly inferior. The theory of morality was a casualty of that unnecessary vengeance” (84).

Although Freud’s relationship with his father has been carefully examined by many scholars, the relationship with his mother remains largely unexplored. Freud himself never subjected to analysis his relationship with the strong and energetic Amalie. The formative role of Freud’s mother in the development of the psychoanalytic theory of gender, female sexuality, and morality is an important question which deserves further investigation. But Sagan’s analysis of this material remains incomplete.

Sagan also aspires to a constructive project: he desires to develop a nonsexist psychoanalytic theory of moral development. He locates the origins of conscience in the pre-Oedipal period, thereby removing the misogyny from Freud’s theory and “correcting” the errors in psychoanalysis. Maternal love and nurture, he suggests, give rise to identification and idealization: these are the sources of a relational and egalitarian moral capacity.

Several problems emerge here. First, Sagan fails to locate his critique in the context of the ongoing discourse regarding feminism, psychoanalysis, morality, and the pre-Oedipal mother. Neither Nancy Chodorow’s analysis of gender development and the pre-Oedipal period nor Carol Gilligan’s relational theory of gender and morality appears in the bibliography. Nor is the work of Juliet Mitchell mentioned. Mitchell’s important text *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) argues that Freud accurately depicted gender and morality in patriarchal cultures. Sagan’s failure to address these materials weakens his argument.

Second, current thinkers in the areas of feminism and psychoanalysis have furthered Mitchell’s analysis by showing the difficulty of separating Freud’s misogyny from his theory. Judith Van Herik (1982) has demonstrated that Freud’s misogyny is structurally embedded in the theory itself: femininity and masculinity function as primary structural foundations of psychoanalysis, working as logical equivalents to wish fulfillment and renunciation, illusion and reason. If Van Herik is right, misogyny cannot be so easily lifted from psychoanalysis: morality is renunciatory and masculine in psychoanalytic theory; it cannot be restructured as fulfilling and feminine.

Third, Sagan misconceives the pre-Oedipal mother-child relation. While he implies that the pre-Oedipal period constitutes a purely feminine realm prior to language and culture, giving rise to true morality, Kristeva’s analysis of faith, and morality in *In The Beginning was Love* shows the error of Sagan’s construction. Kristeva has written other texts which address more specifically the question of cultural misogyny, the pre-Oedipal relationship, and feminist theory (1982, 1986, 1987). *In the Beginning was Love* has a different focus: it
seeks homologies between the experience of religious faith and the experience of the psychoanalytic transference relationship. But Kristeva’s well-known analysis of gender and culture is present, if not explicit, throughout her text.

Kristeva opposes Sagan’s view in an oblique but fundamental way, avoiding the temptation to seek the origins of faith, morality, and love in a simplistic analysis of pre-Oedipal mothering. She speaks of the origins of faith in the experience of divine love, describing faith as a primary identification with a loving and protective agency. This protective agency however, is not only maternal but, through language and culture, paternal and symbolic as well. Similarly, the transference relationship is not a recreation of maternal nurture but a paternal (linguistic, symbolic) relationship of dialogue and exchange based on love: “Overcoming the notion of irremediable separation, Western man... reestablishes a continuity or fusion with an Other that is no longer substantial and maternal but symbolic and paternal” (24, emphasis mine).

Kristeva reminds us that St. Augustine compared Christian faith in God with the infant’s relation to its mother’s breast. Her interpretation of this text reveals her understanding of the transformation of maternal imagery into the paternal symbolic structures of Christianity: “What we have here is fusion with a breast that is, to be sure, succoring, nourishing, loving, protective, but transposed from mother’s body to an invisible agency located in another world” (24). The implications of Kristeva’s argument are powerful. First, contra Sagan, there is no purely feminine, pre-Oedipal basis of morality: morality is inevitably shaped, through language, by patriarchal discourse. Second, Freud’s androcentrism is not defensive, as Sagan would have it, but rather an accurate perception of the embeddedness of the paternal in culture.

Kristeva speaks from a feminist position dramatically different from Sagan’s. Their differences epitomize current debates between French and American feminists. With the finest of intentions, American feminists like Sagan criticize sexism and promote egalitarian visions of human interaction. Kristeva and other French feminists, however, maintain that the American position ignores the subtlety of the cultural construction of gender. While Kristeva is a very conscious participant in this discourse, Sagan is unaware not only of the French feminist perspective but also of the views of the American feminists who share his vision.

Kristeva’s evocative comments on ethics also avoid the reductionism of Sagan’s approach. Sagan argues not only that true conscience originates in the pre-Oedipal relationship but also that Freud’s theory of superego morality is essentially immoral. While Freud has often been attacked for immorality, the standard critique accuses him of an antinomian undermining of social and sex-
ual norms. Sagan's critique is based on the opposite set of assumptions: social and sexual norms are often immoral, and Freud's notion of the social construction of the superego offers no vantage point from which to criticize culturally sanctioned injustice. Kristeva, by contrast, finds in Freud a truly ethical position. Morality in psychoanalytic theory is based on a free engagement with the Other: "only the meaning that my desire may have for another, and hence for me, can control its expansion, hence serve as the unique if tenuous basis of a morality" (63). This moral engagement with the Other comes about through analysis itself: "The real end of analysis occurs when a certain playfulness of spirit returns . . . I am indeed alone, like no other person. Knowing this, I can also play for real, for keeps, at forming bonds, creating communities, helping others, loving, losing" (51). In Kristeva's last words in this text, psychoanalysis becomes the privileged medium of meaning and morality: "psychoanalysis . . . is the modest if tenacious antidote to nihilism . . . [but, Kristeva asks] for how long" (63). Unlike Sagan's oppositional critique of Freud, Kristeva offers a subtle and lyrical homage to Freud, finding an affirmation of relational morality both in Freud's texts and in the analytic situation.

Scharfenberg, in effect, joins Kristeva in defending Freud against Sagan's accusation. Freud does challenge traditional morality, Scharfenberg suggests, by demanding "that ethical decision be based on insight" rather than obedience to authority (130). The resolution to the debates over Freud's ethics lies in the psychoanalytic discussion of the freedom that comes about through the transference relationship: dialogue in analysis becomes "the source of ethical decision, and ethics itself would be stripped of its compelling, enslaving, taboo character and be freed instead to become a kind of traffic code for interaction with other people" (132). This ethical freedom transcends the ahistorical "repetition compulsion," moving toward the possibility of health, change, and love.

The analyses of Kristeva and Scharfenberg serve to exonerate Freud from Sagan's insistence that the superego is immoral. Sagan himself admits toward the end of his book (although only in a footnote) that Freud's late writings on Eros "transform the superego into a truly moral instrument" (215).

Sagan's demonstration of inconsistencies in Freud's analysis of Oedipal resolution and superego function remains an important contribution to the psychoanalytic literature. Provocative, but incompletely developed, are his suggestions regarding Freud's mother and her influence on his theories. Most problematic are his attack on psychoanalysis as immoral and his naive construction of a pre-Oedipal source of morality.

Scharfenberg and Kristeva address two topics which are not concerns of either Sagan or Vitz: language and love. Their comments must be placed in the
context of their books. Written two decades ago in 1968, Scharfenberg’s book was only recently translated from the German. Although somewhat dated, it nevertheless offers a significant analysis of the psychoanalytic critique of religion. Urging theologians to take Freud seriously, Scharfenberg constructs three major arguments. First, Freud’s critique leads not to a dissolution of faith but to a purification of inauthentic elements from faith. Second, Freud’s writings on therapy and culture contain an implicit vision of mature faith. Third, Freud’s analysis of illness and healing offers a theory of language with important implications for theology.

An informative chapter on theological reactions to Freud surveys the European literature. Scharfenberg enumerates both theologians who reacted with hostility to Freud’s work and theologians like Paul Tillich and Oskar Pfister, who embraced psychoanalysis. But his goal is to move beyond both the resistance to Freud and the “uncritical idealization or adaptation of Freud by theologians” toward a “critical interaction” (24) where the practice of psychoanalytic therapy can shape a fresh understanding of religion and theology.

Scharfenberg is most original in his discussion of Freud’s theory of language. He juxtaposes the linguistic nature of diagnosis and cure in Freud with the linguistic nature of hermeneutics and proclamation in theology. For Freud, language is the source of illness: the hysterical symptom is a literalization of a body-based linguistic “organ language.” It is also the basis of healing: psychoanalysis is “the talking cure.” Language and interpretation are interpersonal: meaning emerges through transference and countertransference. Language in therapy leads to a freedom “beyond the ahistorical entrapment in the compulsion to repeat, into a history-making and liberating capacity to love.” Thus language in analysis leads to the freedom to love. This psychoanalytic notion of language, Scharfenberg argues, is deeply relevant to the theological location of proclamation and revelation in language: “Nothing is real until it can be made present by putting it into language and thus reality can be regarded as only a category of language.... In the realm of theology, hermeneutics is the grammar of faith” (103). Scharfenberg thus provocatively explores territories of profound value for theology.

This otherwise fine book is flawed by O. C. Dean Jr.’s poor translation and irresponsible editorial policy. In order to avoid “discouraging the prospective reader” (viii), Dean, a Methodist minister in Georgia, has shortened the text and bibliography and omitted most of the German footnotes. Nevertheless, the book remains a useful text on the theological response to Freud’s critique of religion, offering an articulate portrayal of Christian faith deepened by the psychoanalytic critique.
Julia Kristeva’s *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* grew out of a series of lectures delivered to students at a Catholic school in Versailles. In this slender volume Kristeva develops an extension of her earlier work *Tales of Love*. A wide-ranging examination of love as the root of all narratives, *Tales* included an examination of the amorous dialogue which makes up transference and countertransference in analysis. *In the Beginning* furthers this project, turning specifically to the question of love as the common ground of psychoanalytic therapy and religious faith.

Jacques Lacan is mentioned only twice, but his presence is ubiquitous. Kristeva is constantly in dialogue with him over the question of the human subject, the nature of otherness, and the question of language and affect. Her location of affect (the “semiotic”) at the center of the unconscious represents a subtle departure from Lacan’s insistence on the centrality of language (the “symbolic”) in the unconscious.

The connections Kristeva weaves among language, affect, and body become the context for a discussion of the process of interaction in analytic dialogue, the transformations made possible through successful analysis, and the psychological aptness of the central symbols of Christianity. She notes that the “mobilization of two people’s minds and bodies by the sole agency of the words that pass between them sheds light on Freud’s famous remark ... that the foundation of the cure is ‘Our God Logos’.” It also recalls the words of the gospels, ‘In the beginning was the Word’ and ‘God is love’.

In a delightful analysis of the central symbols of Christianity’s Credo, she suggests that Christianity embodies the basic fantasies encountered every day in the psychic lives of patients: “The almighty father? Patients miss one, want one, or suffer from one. ... More than any other religion, Christianity has unraveled the symbolic and physical importance of the paternal function in human life. ... Consubstantiality with the father and symbolic identification with his name? Patients aspire to nothing else. ... A virgin mother? We want our mothers to be virgins so that we can love them better or allow ourselves to be loved by them without fear of rival. ... The scandal of the cross. ... Christianity supplies images for even the fissures in our secret and fundamental logic. How can we not believe?” (40-42). She likens Christianity to psychoanalysis. With the Credo Christians “have already begun the analytic process. Is it not true that analysis begins with something comparable to faith, namely transferential love?” (52).

Yet Kristeva commends neither faith nor atheism. Analysis favors neither a stoic world comprised of “lonely men and women without ties to one another and without religion” nor a world of illusory faith. Analysis terminates beyond
the need for an illusory faith and beyond the repression of faith in atheism. It terminates with a desire to question all received truths, a capacity for play, and a joyous engagement with others.

While the transferential language of psychoanalysis is the medium of ethics, meaning, and freedom for both Kristeva and Scharfenberg, love functions differently for the two authors. Love is the telos of Scharfenberg’s analysis, but for Kristeva love is the beginning, the context which makes possible both therapeutic analysis and religious faith. Kristeva’s telos is the post-analytic position, where “gravity becomes frivolity and retains its memory of suffering and continues its search for truth in the joy of perpetually making a new beginning” (52). Kristeva’s post-analytic “new beginning,” however, evokes the pre-analytic beginning: in the beginning was love, and in the beginning was the word. Love and language, for Kristeva, are both the beginning and the end of analysis.

Among the first recipients of the Goethe Prize for literature were Albert Schweitzer in 1928 and Sigmund Freud in 1930. A generation earlier Schweitzer had sounded the death knell for naively doctrinaire biographies of Jesus. But just as lives of the historical Jesus would again proliferate by the late twentieth century, so would lives of the religious Freud, in spite of the fact that Freud had tried several times to obstruct his future biographers by burning letters and documents.

If Schweitzer exposed the power of ideologies to generate misperceptions, Freud exposed the power of unconscious wishes. Of the texts and authors examined here, Vitz, Sagan, and Scharfenberg fail to avoid ideologically and unconsciously motivated misperceptions in the reconstruction of their subject. The Christian fundamentalist Vitz baptizes Freud. The feminist Sagan slays the misogynist Freud and sculpts an egalitarian psychoanalysis. The Enlightenment historian Gay denies the significance of Freud’s Jewishness. While the theologian Scharfenberg constructs a productive dialogue between psychoanalysis and theology, he reshapes Freud into an ersatz Christian. Only Kristeva avoids a mythic reconstruction of her subject. She allows Freud to remain a godless Jew, suggestively explores the moral and amorous vision he generated in his creation of psychoanalysis, and acknowledges the paternal and “symbolic” as well as “semiotic” shaping of affect in Western culture.

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